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January 28, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

I am writing to thank you for your leadership in addressing the challenges presented by orphaned oil and gas wells across the United States. As you consider states' applications to receive federal funds for the cleanup of abandoned oil and gas wells in the United States, I urge you to allocate a significant portion for the State of Texas. This funding will be pivotal in shaping the future of our state, helping to eliminate dangerous environmental conditions and pollution across Texas while revitalizing our economy.

The State of Texas has at least 6,489 documented orphaned wells, more than almost any other state. As you know, orphaned wells contaminate surrounding land and groundwater, leaking toxic chemicals and harmful gases, including methane, threatening the health and safety of communities. As representative for Texas' Seventh Congressional District, I understand the risks that these wells pose across our state and across the country. That is why I introduced in the House of Representatives the *REGROW Act*, a bill directing the Department of the Interior to establish a program to provide funds for the plugging, remediating, and reclaiming of orphaned oil and gas wells and surrounding land throughout the United States. That bipartisan legislation set the foundation for the historic investments to plug orphan wells made in the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which I was proud to help pass in the Congress last year.

Knowing the Department's priorities and focus on helping working families, I want to share with you how its objectives can be achieved in Texas, and to urge you to allocate a significant portion of the funds for the State of Texas. The contamination, the environmental and health impacts that result from these sites are felt most acutely in areas that need it the most. Many of the orphaned wells in Texas are found along the southern border around less affluent communities. In fact, the top five counties with abandoned wells in Texas are all at or above the nationwide poverty average. For example, Pecos County, which has more than 500 abandoned wells alone, also has a poverty rate of 19.5%, far above the nationwide average of 13%. We have so many counties with a large number of wells that are communities where environmental justice is needed – and this program can help deliver it.

While the State has a successful well-plugging program, the need for more funding to address the especially high number of orphaned wells across our state is considerable. Orphaned wells in Texas leak an estimated 7-20 million tons of methane a year, the equivalent of taking between 1.5- 4.3 million cars off the road in terms of emissions. In addition to the documented orphaned wells in Texas, there are more than 100,000 wells that are low- or nonproducing that may be orphaned in the future. It is essential that we take immediate action as we work to plug and restore existing orphaned well sites across our state. And from a climate perspective, this effort is an important opportunity have a significant reduction in emissions.

And Texans are ready to do so. As the largest energy-producing state in the nation, Texas is home to millions of skilled oil and gas workers, who have felt the impacts of the pandemic as demand for oil, and rig counts, decreased. Funding from the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* will allow us to put these dedicated and trained workers back to work—and right away. Our oil and gas workforce is uniquely situated to address this issue if granted the financial resources to do so.

The significant investments in orphaned well site plugging, remediation, and restoration activities included in the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* will have monumental impacts on the future of our public health and safety, environment, and economy—and it is exactly the type of investment we need to make in Texas. As the lead sponsor of the *REGROW Act* in the House, it is exciting to see this truly transformative bill coming to life, and to see the Departments efforts to make these investments to quickly.

I appreciate your continued leadership on these issues and am grateful for your consideration of this request for the State of Texas. If I can provide any additional information, or be of any assistance to you, I would of course be glad to. I look forward to the opportunity to welcome you to our state to see this program in action.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "F".

Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress